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PANAMA

Gerardo GONZALEZ Vernaza

Minister of Agricultural Development

In October 1972 Gerardo González (pronounced gohnZAHlehs), a cousin of Panamanian strong man Brig. Gen. Omar Torrijos, became Minister of Agricultural Development. He had previously served for 3 years as Vice Minister of Commerce and Industry. Information concerning González' current attitude toward the United States is unavailable, but he was open and cooperative with US Embassy officials in Panama during his tenure as Vice Minister.



In addition to his ministerial post, González has served since November 1971 as executive secretary of the New Panama Movement (MNP). Torrijos' personal political vehicle, the MNP was organized to replace the political parties outlawed after his October 1968 coup, but it has remained little more than a paper organization. González has also been a member of the National Supply Commission (CNA) since December 1973. The CNA is charged with determining what raw materials and manufactured products are necessary for consumption and the normal functioning of the economy and with guaranteeing their adequate and timely supply.

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Political Orientation

A longtime member of the Communist People's Party (PdP), González apparently ended his active association with the party after becoming Vice Minister of Commerce in April 1969. He may have continued as a secret PdP member for a time but probably drifted away from the party as his influence with Torrijos increased.

In November 1972 González emphatically denied that he was a Communist and stated that he was more of a socialist in his thinking and favored strong government participation in the economic field. In April 1973, however, his name appeared on a PdP list of its friends and contributors. President Demetrio Lakas explained in June 1973 that González had been a Communist at one time but had given up the party

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Early Life and Career

Gerardo González Vernaza was born on 13 April 1929 in Santiago, Veraguas Province, Panama. He attended the Normal School of Santiago and while there edited *El Cholo*, a Communist weekly newspaper. González later entered the School of Public and Business Administration at the University of Panama, where he was an active member of the Communist-dominated Federation of Panamanian Students. In 1951 González was first identified as a PdP member, and in the following year he was listed as a member of the local PdP Central Committee in Santiago, a position that he held until at least 1962. Before 1958 González graduated from the University of Panama and began working in the Office of the Comptroller General, where he remained until he became Vice Minister of Commerce and Industry.

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In October 1958 González attended a statistics course in Lima, Peru. He accompanied Torrijos to El Salvador in January 1973 to attend a Central American trade fair. González attended meetings of the Central American and Panamanian Agricultural Ministers held in David, Panama, in March 1973.

Personal Data

He is married.

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19 February 1974

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